DAWN

METRO South

KARACHI Thursday, January 22, 2026

KARACHI

Sunset	06:09pm
Sunrise (Tomorrow)	07:16am

NEXT 24 HRS

Minimum	8°C
Maximum	24°C
Humidity	62%
Outlook	Th-Storms

Alcaraz spearheads big names into Australian Open third round

Pg.18 SPORT

Remand of 'serial child rapist' extended in two cases

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Two judicial magistrates extended the police remand of a suspected child rapist in two sexual assault cases.

According to police, forensic analysis revealed that the suspect was involved in the rape of more than 100 minor boys in the city over the past five years.

The police brought the suspect before judicial magistrates of districts South and East, separately in two rape cases, after the expiry of his first police remand, which had been granted on Jan 17.

The investigating officer (IO) informed the courts that the suspect was apprehended while attempting to take a minor boy on a motorcycle with the intention of sexually assaulting him. However, the child raised a hue and cry which led the people in the area to apprehend the suspect. Later, they handed him over to the police.

He added that the forensic analysis report revealed that the suspect was allegedly involved in at least seven rape cases registered at Sharafi Goth, Zaman Town, KIA, Mehmoodabad and three FIRs at Defence police stations for offences under Section 377 (rape) and other provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code over the past five years.

The IO requested the courts to extend the police custody, stating that further remand was required to conduct an identification parade and to record statements of the survivor children before the magistrate under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

After hearing the IO, both courts extended the physical remand of the suspect for four days and directed the IO to produce him at the next hearing along with a progress report.

PEOPLE light earthen lamps outside the Karachi Press Club on Wednesday in remembrance of the victims of the Gul Plaza fire tragedy.—APP

30 charred bodies recovered from one Gul Plaza shop

Death toll climbs to 61; police say bodies found from mezzanine floor; identification awaits DNA testing

By Imtiaz Ali

KARACHI: In a harrowing development, at least 30 bodies charred beyond recognition were recovered from a crockery shop of Gul Plaza on Wednesday afternoon, increasing the death toll to 61, officials said.

South DIG Syed Asad Raza told *Dawn* that the bodies had been recovered from a shop called "Dubai crockery" located on the mezzanine floor of the destroyed building.

An area resident, Rasheed, told *Dawn* that the gutted shop had announced a sale for the wedding season and had extended the shop's closing time, though generally it was closed at 10pm.

The DIG recalled that relatives of missing persons and shopkeepers had already suggested the possibility of a large number of people being present at the shop. He assumed that the victims were the shop owner, his two employees, a couple and their son, among others.

DIG Raza said that as per the last contacts of the victims with their relatives, they thought they would be safe there and come out of the shop when the fire was controlled, but ostensibly, they were suffocated to death while waiting.

He estimated that a total of 61 persons had been killed. However, a conclusion about their identification and exact number could be made after receipt of DNA reports.

Regarding the visit of a bomb disposal squad to the site of the incident on Wednesday, the DIG stated that, so far, no mischief had been discovered during the initial investigation of the inferno.

Inquiry committee visits gutted building

Karachi Commissioner Syed Hassan Naqvi, the convener of an inquiry committee formed by the Sindh government to ascertain the circumstances that led to the fire, along with city police chief Additional Inspector Genreal Azad Khan visited Gul Plaza.

Speaking to the media on this occasion, the commissioner said an inquiry has just begun. He said the building's condition was to a large extent dilapidated, while an adjacent high-rise Rimpa Plaza was also affected, but it had not been declared a dangerous site.

Mr Naqvi lamented that fire safety measures inside the building were not of an international standard.

The city police chief said so far, no evidence about sabotage has emerged. "We are investigating the incident thoroughly," he said.

He refuted media reports that two dumper trucks carrying debris from Gul Plaza to the KMC ground in Pak Colony had disappeared.

Search operation continues

The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's official Zafar Khan, while talking to the media on the spot, said that from Saturday night, when the fire broke out, they have been working day and night.

He said the firefighting teams are still working inside despite the presence of "extreme heat" while cooling work continued simultaneously at two spots in the gutted plaza.

"We will try to retrieve the bodies buried under the debris," he vowed, adding that firemen were being sent to the spots where the building's structure was still stable, as our one fireman had already lost his life.

The KMC official refuted charges of delayed response. He said three fire tenders had been sent immediately after receiving information about the fire on Saturday night. There were more fire tenders, but the road was narrowed due to construction activity.

Besides, the shopkeepers had created a chaotic situation and were allegedly snatching pipes from firefighters to extinguish the fire in their shops first, he added.

He said the door of the roof of the building was locked; therefore, people could not reach the roof when they attempted. He said it was the market's closing time when the fire erupted, which was why most of the doors were also closed.

NICVD seeks Rs3.5bn from govt to cover rising operational costs

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Senior officials representing the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) on Wednesday sought immediate financial assistance of Rs3.5 billion from the Sindh government to help cover the operational shortfalls that have occurred due to rising administrative and service costs.

The 84th governing body meeting of the NICVD was presided over by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah at CM House. The attendees included health minister Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab, MPA Rukhsana Parveen, Sadia Javed, Finance Secretary Fayaz Jatoi, Health Secretary Rehan Baloch and Mushtaq Chhapra.

The meeting took several decisions to safeguard the institute's future and expand its life-saving services, focusing on budget enhancements and infrastructure development, among other matters.

The CM directed officials to finalise appointment of a firm to develop a comprehensive business plan for the merger and administrative streamlining of NICVD and Sindh Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases.

The meeting decided to resolve all legal ambiguities to ensure that the institution continued to serve the public without hindrance.

The governing body approved the recruitment of a full-time chief operating officer and a chief financial officer through a competitive, open-market process. The chief minister directed the health department to establish rules before beginning the recruitment.

The meeting was briefed on the urgent need for an additional Rs3.5bn grant for current fiscal year (2025-2026) to cover operational shortfalls. It was noted that Rs10bn was approved by the chief minister, yet the institute faced a total funding deficit of approximately Rs4.6bn due to rising administrative and service costs.

The chief minister constituted a committee under Finance Secretary Jatoi to examine the NICVD's business model and suggest reforms. The committee was asked to prepare a report to address institute's financial problems.

Executive Director Prof Tahir Saghir provided an extensive briefing on NICVD's progress in 2025 during which, he said, a total of 9,925 primary angioplasties were performed.

The institute, he said, also saw over 200 Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) procedures free of charge, a service costing roughly Rs4 million in private hospitals.

The NICVD also extended its paediatric cardiac services into Balochistan, performing over 100 surgeries and 300 interventions for children.

The dedicated Stroke Intervention Programme completed over 450 procedures, saving countless lives from permanent neurological damage.

After two-year delay, SBCA issues fire safety directives

Building regulator accused of 'sitting on' a KMC fire audit report for over two years; critics term move 'too little, too late'

By Imran Ayub

KARACHI: Only after a devastating fire at Gul Plaza caused massive human and financial losses, enraging the public over the lack of firefighting mechanisms and emergency exits, has the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) decided to enforce fire safety rules in buildings in the metropolis.

The delayed action has triggered backlash from builders, developers and civil society, who say that the building regulator has been sitting on a KMC fire safety audit report for over two years despite being formally notified.

They termed the SBCA's sudden directives to building owners "too little, too late", accusing the authority of criminal negligence and questioning how many lives could have been saved if the warnings had been acted upon earlier.

"Since the SBCA will not be able to achieve the desired objectives without the cooperation of your members in this matter, you are therefore requested to direct your members to immediately comply with the fire safety deficiencies highlighted in the audit reports within three days, as this is an urgent matter requiring immediate compliance," said a SBCA letter to the Association of Builders and Developers (ABAD) chairman.

The KMC in January 2024 compiled a report on fire safety in hundreds of buildings across Karachi, following a deadly blaze at RJ Mall on Rashid Minhas Road in 2023.

The report identified at least 265 buildings lacking fire safety systems, emergency exits or a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the fire brigade. It warned that these structures could face disastrous consequences in case of a fire.

However, the SBCA moved to implement the report's recommendations only after the Gul Plaza tragedy and that too more than two years later.

Muhammad Hassan Bakhshi, the ABAD chairman, — who has been asked by the SBCA to "cooperate" in implementing the fire compliance rules "within three days" — said he was hearing about the report for the "first time".

He said the SBCA had never approached him earlier in this connection, adding that now it appeared that the authority was "trying to complete years of inaction in a matter of days".

"These surveys and their implementation will only open another door to corruption," Mr Bakhshi warned.

He stressed the need to digitise regulatory processes, arguing that reducing human-to-human contact was essential to prevent further corruption.

Saad Abdul Wahab, a fire and structural safety expert and CEO of Grow Safe, criticised the SBCA's sudden push for fire safety compliance, warning that the move appears to be a temporary correction.

"A proper corrective action requires identifying root causes, assessing hazards, and implementing suitable and sufficient control measures," he said.

He questioned the seriousness of the regulator and asked which legal framework or safety standard the authority

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Woman shot dead by ex-husband

KARACHI: A young woman was gunned down allegedly by her former husband in her Korangi home on Wednesday, officials said.

They identified the victim as Kainat, 25, and said that her former husband Taj Mohammed fled after killing her.

Korangi SSP Fida Husain Janwari told *Dawn* that the victim had recently married another man, but it appeared that her former husband was not happy with her decision. —Staff Reporter

Benazir Bhutto — She Walked into the Fire launched

Author Farhatullah Babar says he has fulfilled his commitment about making public her struggles, thoughts and journey

By Peerzada Salman

KARACHI: Farhatullah Babar's new book, *Benazir Bhutto — She Walked into the Fire*,was unveiled at the Karachi Press Club on Wednesday evening.

Published by Lightstone Publishers, the memoir of a long-time speechwriter and spokesperson for late Benazir Bhutto offers a rare, unflinching and intimate account of a woman who dared to return to a battlefield she knew was laid with mines for her.

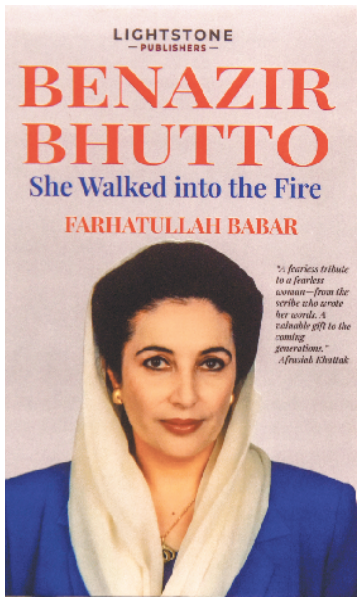
Speaking on the occasion, Mr Babar began his address to the media by thanking the KPC for hosting the event and the one held last year related to his book on Mr Zardari. He then extended his gratitude to the publishers for printing books as an intellectual pursuit and not as a commercial enterprise.

On the contents of the book, he said it's about Bibi's [Benazir] personal life. He had been her speechwriter and spokesman for 20 years. She had said to him he must write books to which he had replied that he would do so when he would not be her or her party's spokesperson.

He said by writing this book, he has fulfilled his commitment to Bibi about making public her struggles, thoughts and journey.

Mr Babar said the most surprising aspect of Benazir Bhutto's period is Pakistan's democratic structure and the country's relations with other countries of the region… "We talk a lot about what dictators do, but in this book, for the first time, it has been mentioned that Pakistan's political map and structure was being made in the capital city of some other country. Was it being made there independently or the dictatorship here was involved in it, this is a question worth pondering."

Recalling his meeting with an unnamed Pakistani-American citizen after 9/11 on the instruction of Benazir Bhutto, Mr Babar said the messages given to him for her were: "Gen Musharraf should not be disturbed; putting an end to terrorism is our top priority after 9/11, restoration of democracy in Pakistan is not our priority; you [Bhutto] should not return to Pakistan until 2007; elections in Pakistan are not our priority and even if the polls are held, you're not allowed to take part in them; we have talked about Pak-India relations with Musharraf and he has agreed as to what's going to happen."



Mr Babar said when he went to Bibi in Dubai from Washington. "She told me to stay in touch with that man and the Americans, not commit anything and see how things move on. So this kept going on. The surprising thing is whatever the Americans said, all of them happened till 2007 the way they had said. Ms Bhutto couldn't come back, nor was she allowed to participate in elections. In 2007, when she comes back, the question that begs an answer is: the people who wrote the script for Shaheed Bibi from 2001 to 2007, was the Dec 2007 incident part of that script? All investigative people should give a thought to it."

He said the second thing in the book is that during exile, Bibi turned from a politician into a stateswoman. She was faced with two important issues. The first was how to put an end to the frequent imposition of martial law. The second: what would be our standpoint on nuclear proliferation that's taken place from Pakistan.

After his speech, the floor was opened for questions.

Responding to the query about the identity of the Pakistani-American, he said he couldn't reveal his name as per Ms Bhutto's instructions.

Speaking on the occasion, Lightstone Publisher Managing Director Ameena Saiyid said it was a pleasure and honour working with Mr Babar.

Omayr Saiyid, Fazil Jamili and Dr Naazir Mahmood also spoke while Rahila Baqai moderated the event.